DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 586 EC 302 026

AUTHOR	Russell, Steven C.; And Others
TITLE	Rural America Institute for Special Educators: A Collaborative Preservice Teacher Training Program for Rural Special Education.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Nov 92
CONTRACT	H029J90015
NOTE	17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children (15th, Cincinnati, OH, November 11-14, 1992).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College School Cooperation; Cooperative Programs; *Disabilities; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Labor Turnover; Needs Assessment; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Program Development; *Rural Education; Special Education; Special Education Teachers; Teacher Recruitment; Teacher Shortage
IDENTIFIERS	Ohio (Northwest); Preservice Teachers; Rural America Institute for Special Educators

ABSTRACT

Project RAISE (Rural America Institute for Special Educators) was a preservice teacher training program specifically designed for preparing special educators for the demands of rural settings. The project was conducted by the Department of Special Education at Bowling Green State University (Ohio) and concentrated on training special educators in a 12-county region in northwest Ohio. Project goals included: (1) train teachers to meet the academic, social, vocational, and ancillary service needs of rural special education students; (2) improve the quality of training to rural special education preservice trainees; and (3) assist in the recruitment and retention of teaching personnel specifically trained for rural special education. The program covered problems and issues for personnel in rural special education, foundations and instructional strategies for rural special education, instructional design, collaboration for related educational services, consultation skills, statistics, research, and various practicum experiences. The paper documents the regional need for special education preparation; lists teaching competencies identified as important; and describes project goals, recruitment of students, project faculty, the pre-training program, the graduate training program, program content, and program evaluation. (JDD)

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ED356586

Rural America Institute for Special Educators: A Collaborative Preservice Teacher Training Program for Rural Special Education

Steven C. Russell, Ellen U. Williams, & Veronica Gold

Bowling Green State University

This paper was presented at the "Transactions: Changing and Affecting Change," TED/CEC Conference, 15th Annual National Conference, Teacher Education Division, Council for Exceptional Children, held in Cincinnati, Ohio, on November 11-14, 1992. The preparation of this paper was funded, in part, by Grant #HO29J90015 - Project RAISE - from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, to Drs. Steven C. Russell, Veronica Gold, and Ellen U. Williams, and Bowling Green State University. Address for correspondence: Dr. Steven C. Russell, Co-Director, Project RAISE, Department of Special Education, 449 Education Building, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403. Telephone: (419)372-7299 or (419)372-7281.

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Steven C. Russell, Ph.D.
Ellen U. Williams, Ph.D.
Veronica Gold, Ph.D.
Project RAISE
Department of Special Education
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403

Rural America Institute for Special Educators: A Collaborative Preservice Teacher Training Program for Rural Special Education

INTRODUCTION

Project RAISE (Rural America Institute for Special Educators) was a unique preservice teacher training program specifically designed for preparing special educators for the demands of rural settings. The project was conducted by the Department of Special Education at Bowling Green State University and concentrated on training special educators in a twelve county region in northwest Ohio. The Northwest Ohio Special Education Regional Resource Center (SERRC) identified the school systems within this twelve county region as being predominantly rural.

National Needs for Training in Rural Special Education

As we begin the decade of the 1990's, we are faced with the need to provide more appropriate training for special education teachers for rural settings. This training project attempted to address this need.

On a national level, there is evidence of a shortage in the teaching field of special education. According to the 1988 annual report from the Association for School, College and University Staffing (ASCUS), there is a considerable shortage in the supply of special education teachers based on relative demand. Those special education fields with the greatest teacher shortages are in the areas of emotionally disturbed, learning disabilities, and multihandicapped (Akin, 1988). Thus, there continues to be a need for training special education teachers at the preservice level in order to ameliorate the supply and demand discrepancy.

With approximately 67% of the nation's 16,000 public school districts being classified as "rural" (Sher, 1978), it would seem imperative to continue addressing the educational needs of rural America. Rural school environments have been characterized as: having higher poverty levels than nonrural settings; increasing in population; and not having increases in tax bases. Rural schools have been characterized as: having scarce professional resources, having costlier services than urban areas due to transportation requirements and staffing needs, and serving greater percentages of handicapped students than urban areas (Helge, 1984).

While the passage of Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) has helped in increasing the number of handicapped students being identified and served in rural areas, there are still numerous problems inherent within the special education delivery systems for rural America. National research

conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Office of Special Education in 1983 revealed the following major problems in serving rural handicapped students: funding inadequacies; negative attitudes toward handicapped students; recruiting qualified staff; long distances between schools and services; retention of qualified staff; service provision for low-incidence handicaps; transportation inadequacies; involving parents; staff development needs; resistance to change; providing support services; and, professional isolation (Helge, 1984). Additional information from this study revealed that most teacher training institutions do not address special rural needs and circumstances in training personnel to work with rural handicapped students. This study also articulated an expressed need for providing training in generalizable noncategorical skills for special education personnel because most rural special educators are working with numerous handicapping conditions with limited specialists available.

Another critical concern relative to rural special education personnel is their high attrition rate. It has been reported that there is a 20% annual attrition rate nationally for special education teachers. In rural areas, that attrition rate can range as high as 30%-60% especially for personnel in specialized areas such as speech and physical therapists and for itinerant teachers serving low-incidence populations (McIntosh, 1986). This high attrition rate may be reduced if teachers are trained at the preservice level to work with rural special populations. It has been postulated that if rural personnel are specifically trained to work with rural handicapped, they will have greater personal and professional success (Marrs, 1984).

State of Ohio Needs for Training in Rural Special Education

Based on information from Ohio's Comprehensive System of Professional Development (CSPD) plan (October 1988), Ohio's institutions of higher education graduated 1,754 special education personnel in 1987. Projections for graduates in special education for 1988 and 1989 were 1,850 and 1,925, respectively. While it might appear that Ohio teacher training institutions are producing an adequate number of special education personnel, it should be noted that Ohio's State Division of Teacher Education and Certification had to issue 1,225 temporary special education certificates from January 1 through December 31, 1988.

Two related personnel training needs at the state level which are relevant to this project include new state requirements for teacher certification. As of July 1, 1987, all first year teachers must complete a one-year entry-year program under the mentorship of certified, experienced teachers. These new regulations also require that certification renewals from professional to permanent certification will require applicants to acquire a Master's degree.

Regional Needs for Training in Rural Special Education

The Northwest Ohio Special Education Regional Resource Center (SERRC) services an area of 13 counties. This SERRC has identified twelve of its 13 counties as being predominantly rural in their service delivery systems of education. Within this regional area of northwest Ohio, there is a total Average Daily Membership of 175,912 students of which 11% or 19,366 students have been identified as handicapped. With nearly 20,000 special needs students being served

in the twelve county area, it should be noted that there are a number of teachers who have been hired to teach these special education classes are under temporary certification.

Based on information reported from the Northwest Ohio SERRC in the Summer of 1988 (Ratliffe, 1988), the following special education personnel shortage was reported for the 1987-88 school year in the 13 counties of Northwest Ohio:

Area	Personnel Shortage
Preschool (age 3-5 years) Special education teachers, itinerant/ consulting teachers, home/hospital teachers	15 FTE
School (age 6-21 years)	
Deaf Blind	.05 FTE
Multihandicapped	26 FTE
Hearing Handicapped	0 FTE
Visually Handicapped	1.8 FTE
Orthopedically/Other Health Handicapped	0 FTE
Severe Behavior Handicapped	16 FTE
Developmentally Handicapped	9 FTE
Specific Learning Disabilities	35.1 FTE

In an attempt to provide further documentation for a regional need for special education preparation for rural settings, letters of support from regional personnel were elicited, and obtained. Additionally, a needs assessment was disseminated to northwest Ohio county superintendents, selected building principals, selected special education teachers, and selected special education supervisors. These surveys were developed to gain information on the needs found in rural special education within the twelve county area in northwest Ohio.

The superintendents' surveys were sent to each of the twelve county superintendents and to each of the twelve county boards of mental retardation school superintendents in northwest Ohio (N = 24). Based on a 71% return rate (N = 17), the following results were compiled relative to rural special education:

- 100% of the respondents self-identified as having primarily rural school districts within their county;
- 76% indicated it was difficult to hire qualified special education teachers for rural areas (particularly in the areas of severe behavior handicaps, multihandicapped and developmentally handicapped);
- 53% found it difficult to retain (for longer than 3 years) special education teachers for rural areas (particularly in the areas of severe behavior handicaps, multihandicapped and developmentally handicapped);
- the average percentage of special education teachers in these counties holding master's degrees is 32%;
- 88% of the respondents indicated that they found it difficult to hire qualified support personnel (particularly in the areas of physical therapy, occupational therapy, school psychology and adapted physical education;
- 53% of the respondents found it difficult to retain (longer than 3 years) qualified support personnel (particularly in the

areas of physical therapy, occupational therapy, school psychology and adapted physical education.

The superintendents selected the following factors contributing to the difficulty in hiring/retaining qualified special education teaches and support personnel for rural areas: 70% salary; 59% lack of certificated personnel; 53% travel distances; 29% social isolation; 24% professional isolation; 24% career opportunities; 24% lack of training for rural settings; and, 24% conservatism of rural communities.

The second survey was sent to four educators (two administrators or supervisors in special education and two special education teachers) in each of the twelve rural counties in northwest Ohio. Based on a return rate of 64% (N = 29), the following information was compiled:

- the average number of years working in a rural education setting for respondents was 10.8 years;
- some reasons cited by survey participants for selecting rural employment included: more contact with colleagues, less red tape, hometown, husband's employment, challenge of meeting money needs, first job offer, likes rural kids and schools better than urban, good area to raise family, and comfortable because they grew up in rural area;
- some of the disadvantages of working in rural educational settings cited were: small number of low incidence handicaps cause transportation and funding problems, isolation from other special education contacts, limited special education options, multiple responsibilities, lack of support services, limited resources, and low salary;
- some of the advantages of working in rural education included: freedom to develop creative program options; lack of bureaucracy; fewer problems with parents; better communication between faculty, staff, administration; smaller class sizes; and, greater community support;
- 93% of the respondents reported that they had no formal coursework or inservice training specifically relative to providing special education in a rural setting;
- 66% reported that they would participate in coursework or inservice programs on rural special education if they were offered.

The following represent the teaching competencies most frequently selected by participants as being important: (the percentage of respondents selecting the competency is noted).

%	Competency
83	Application on behavioral analysis to student behavior
79	Using curricula for program planning
76	Knowledge of alternative teaching strategies
72	Selection and adaptation of appropriate academic materials
69	Using local employment needs to develop vocational training

%	Competency (Cont'd.)
69	Selection/administration of appropriate assessment tools
66	Use of consultation with parents
62	Age appropriate skill training
59	Use of medical emergency intervention strategies
59	Application of time management strategies
59	Coordination of multifactored assessment activities
59	Use of consultation with peers
55	Use of alternative communication systems
55	Behavioral analysis for academic/vocational training
45	Federal/state mandates for educating handicapped students
41	Selecting adaptive devices for physical/cognitive development
41	Designing adaptive devices for physical/cognitive development

Participants also selected the following as important services in which special educators should be skilled in assisting with carry-over supplemental services:

%	Service Areas
76	Language development therapy
72	Occupational therapy
66	Physical therapy
66	Speech therapy
66	Guidance and counseling
62	Adaptive physical education
55	Music therapy
48	Art therapy
38	Mobility orientation

Project RAISE was then designed to address the needs of improving special education services delivery in rural areas. As training programs prepare special educators for rural settings, special education systems in rural America will reflect improved service delivery at program and instructional levels. In this type of system, there is likely to be a reduction in personnel recruitment problems and an amelioration of retention problems, as well as an increase in the quality and quantity of services being provided for handicapped infants, children, and youth.

PROJECT RAISE: THE TRAINING PROGRAM

Project and Program Goals

This preservice training program for rural special education personnel was designed to utilize knowledge and skills from both special education and rural education. In addition, this program was designed to incorporate the rural special education classroom as a vital training component. In other words, the design of this program took into account the rich resource provided by direct experience in rural special education settings. Further, this program was designed to directly influence the problems associated with retention of rural special education personnel. As will be seen when examining the criteria for participant selection, maximum emphasis was placed on locating and training those participants most likely to remain in

rural special education settings for three or more years. It should also be noted that all participants of Project RAISE were considered preservice relative to training specifically for rural special education.

Specific goals. 1. To train teachers to effectively meet the academic, social, vocational, and ancillary service needs of rural special education students.

2. To improve the quality of training to rural special education preservice trainees.

3. To assist in the recruitment and retention of teaching personnel specifically trained for rural special education.

Program objectives. 1.1 To establish project staff.
1.2 To recruit project trainees from both the senior level undergraduate student population, and from the existing practicing rural special education personnel.
1.3 To obtain a commitment from rural school districts with participating practicing special educators to allow teaming of a preservice teacher with a practicing teacher and on-the-job practica.
1.4 To train teachers to effectively meet the needs of rural special education settings.
1.5 To maintain, beyond the funding of this project, a training program to meet the specific needs of rural special education teachers.
2.1 To provide content coursework, practicum experiences, and other educational experiences which are specifically designed to develop and enhance skills and abilities of personnel for practice in rural special education settings.
2.2 To obtain materials and resources that facilitate participants in achieving knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for teaching in a rural special education setting.
3.1 To increase the number of special education teaching personnel with training for rural special education settings.
3.2 To increase the likelihood that those trained specifically for rural special education will be employed and remain in service in rural areas.

Recruitment of Students

Special education personnel shortages in northwest Ohio are resultant from an inability to attract, employ, and retain qualified special educators serving multihandicapped and severe behaviorally handicapped students. However, recent research suggests that individuals currently living in rural areas are more likely to commit themselves to service there. Of the 79 counties represented by students at BGSU, 74 are rural. Further, all rural counties within the Project RAISE service area had BGSU students residing within them who had declared a special education major. Thus, there was an ample pool of students who reside in rural areas from which to select project participants on a statewide or local basis.

Project RAISE attracted a significant number of well-qualified students from all rural counties of Ohio. The Project's association with the Department of Special Education at BGSU allowed it to profit from an earned reputation for "state-of-the-art" teacher training programs and was able to attract very capable students as a result. Project RAISE benefitted from its affiliation with the Department relative to the selection of preservice project applicants from a

qualified pool of candidates, and allowed selection of those graduate degree candidates that were most likely to remain in rural settings once trained.

Project Faculty

In addition to the instructional roles of the project co-directors, additional faculty were selected for participation in the project from the Departments of Foundations and Inquiry, and Administration and Supervision in the College of Education and Allied Professions as well as the Physical Therapy Program and Department of Communication Disorders in the College of Health and Human Services, and the Music Therapy and Art Therapy Programs in the College of Arts and Sciences. The role of these staff members was to: 1) use needs assessment data gathered by the project co-directors to develop or enhance training modules which promote integration of ancillary service in special education programs; 2) develop communication and consultation skills necessary for continued collaboration between parents, administrators, medical personnel, ancillary school personnel and special educators; 3) teach special educators professional competencies related to their discipline necessary for collaborative efforts between special educators and ancillary personnel; and, 4) work with project evaluators to determine whether coursework and practice experiences lead to improved integration of ancillary services in special educational programs of handicapped students.

Pre-Training Program

First, five students were selected from among undergraduate seniors majoring in special education. The previously outlined recruitment criteria was applied to these candidates. At the same time, five school systems in Northwest Ohio which met the criteria for rural school systems, and which employed special education personnel were selected for participation in the project. Contracts for the use of these rural special education sites as practicum sites were established during this phase of the project.

In cooperation with the administrators and teachers of the five rural school systems in Northwest Ohio identified for participation in the training project, five practicing special education teachers were selected for participation in the project. Again, the criteria enumerated above for recruitment of participants were employed here in order to better ensure retention of trained personnel in the rural settings. Furthermore, the practicing rural special education teachers selected for participation in this project were viewed as preservice in the sense that these participants had not experienced previous training specifically for rural special education. Selection of all participants occurred during the fall academic semester.

An advisory board comprised of parents of youth who are handicapped and educated by rural schools, administrators of rural school systems, teachers -- both special and regular -- from rural school systems, Project RAISE faculty, and identified student participants was given the charge to advise and critique project development and implementation.

An informational conference was held during the later part of the fall academic term. The purpose of this conference was to advise all identified participants in Project RAISE (i.e., the five identified senior undergraduate students, the five practicing rural

special education teachers, the members of the advisory board, and the established interdisciplinary teaching faculty) of the scope and sequence of the program in which they were participating.

During the spring academic semester, the five identified senior undergraduate students were placed with the five practicing special education teachers for completion of the student teaching requirement prior to these senior students' graduation and certification. This allowed the development of five teams, each comprised of a practicing rural special education teacher and a senior undergraduate student who was completing requirements for certification in special education. Along with this student teaching experience and development of teams, special seminars were scheduled in order to aid in the bonding and mentoring between student teacher and practicing teacher, to aid in understanding the needs of rural special educators, and to assist communication between participants of the project and the project staff.

Graduate Training Program

During the summer, an educational institute for the identified participants was held. All participants (it should be noted that the senior undergraduate participants who were student teaching with the practicing rural special education teachers graduated following the spring semester; these students then matriculated into the graduate program in special education for the remainder of their participation in the project; further, it should be noted that these formerly undergraduate students are henceforth referred to as preservice teachers to avoid confusing them with the identified practicing rural special education teachers) were in residence at BGSU for a summer educational institute through which each participant accrued 13 semester hours of graduate credit, applicable toward a Master of Education in Special Education degree with a specialization in rural special education. The coursework involved in this institute provided instruction in statistics and research methodology, foundations and instructional strategies in rural special education, problems and issues in rural special education, and advisement on the graduate program (EDFI 596: Statistics in Education; EDFI 597: Research in Education; EDSE 549: Problems and Issues for Personnel in Rural Special Education; EDSE 580: Foundations and Instructional Strategies for Rural Special Education; and, EDSE 580: Professional Development Seminar in Special Education). As a part of this coursework, participant teams (formed by a preservice teacher and a practicing rural special education teacher) in Project RAISE identified and planned research projects which would expand knowledge and abilities regarding rural special education, and were to be carried out during the next academic year.

During the next academic year, the preservice teacher and the practicing rural special education teacher continued to function as a team in providing instruction to special education students in the rural school system. This team continued to operate through assignment to the same classroom and school setting utilized during the student teaching phase of the project. This arrangement also allowed continued use of a mentoring model.

In addition, both preservice teachers and practicing rural special education teachers returned to the university setting for content coursework. The two members of each team rotated between

"on-campus" instruction and practicum experience. In this manner, the project attempted to minimize the disruption of the instructional process within the special education classroom. Thus, while one individual of a team was receiving training and coursework at the university, the other was completing practicum assignments in the rural school setting and staffing the rural special education classroom.

The following table delineates the rotation schedule for the members of a team.

Team Schedule

School Term	On Campus for Coursework	Special Education Classroom/Practicum
Summer	Practicing Teacher Preservice Teacher	
Fall (1st 8 weeks)	Preservice Teacher	Practicing Teacher
(2nd 8 weeks)	Practicing Teacher	Preservice Teacher
Spring (1st 8 weeks)	Preservice Teacher	Practicing Teacher
(2nd 8 weeks)	Practicing Teacher	Preservice Teacher

While a participating teacher (either practicing or preservice) was "on-campus" two and one half days per week for coursework and training, he/she returned to the rural special education classroom the remaining two and one half days per week to complete practicum assignments and research activities as well as to maintain the integrity of the handicapped student/teacher relationship.

The coursework taken during the fall and spring semester of the academic year was distributed over the following areas: adapted instructional procedures; selection and design of adapted devices; consultation with parents, support personnel, administration, community resource persons; assessment; speech and language therapy; vocational training; and transition programming. During the fall semester the participants in the project enrolled in the following courses and practicum: EDSE 580: Advanced Instructional Design for Rural Special Education; EDSE 580: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - I; and, EDSE 562: Practicum in Rural Special Education - I. During the spring semester the participants in the project enrolled in the following courses and practicum: EDSE 580: Consultation Skills for Rural Special Education; EDSE 580: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - II; and, EDSE 562: Practicum in Rural Special Education - II.

During these two semesters the participants of Project RAISE accrued a total of 24 semester hours toward their Master of Education in Special Education degree with specialization in rural special education. Upon successful completion of the spring semester these participants had accrued a grand total (including those hours accumulated during the previous summer) of 37 semester hours of credit.

This group of participants then completed the project during the following summer term by completing their research projects. They accomplished this by enrolling in EDSE 599: Thesis Research for 3

semester hours of credit. Upon completion of this experience, and the summer term, all five preservice teachers and all five practicing rural special education teachers graduated from Bowling Green State University each with a Master of Education in Special Education degree with specialization in rural special education.

The training cycle repeated itself each year of Project RAISE with a new group of ten participants.

Program Content

The following discussion provides the reader with information concerning the specific content and organization of Project RAISE. This discussion includes delineation of the courses and practica participants experienced during Project RAISE; the competencies emphasized throughout this training program that specifically addressed the needs of rural special education teaching personnel; explanation of the demonstration or practicum experiences in which trainees participated for the purpose of evaluating learning and application; incorporation of current research on the needs of rural special education teaching personnel; and, learner outcomes and their evaluation.

Program competencies.

EDSE 549: Problems and Issues for Personnel in Rural Special Education, included the global concepts and competencies identified by Helge (1983), and elaborated by Marrs (1984) related to an "understanding of the context of a rural school and its environment," and, "knowledge concerning the state-of-the-art of rural special education," (Marrs, 1984, p. 338).

EDSE 580: Foundations and Instructional Strategies for Rural Special Education, included the global concepts and competencies identified by Helge (1983), and elaborated by Marrs (1984) related to "understanding the differences involved in serving handicapped students in rural and urban environments," and, "knowledge of effective service delivery models for rural handicapped children (including low-incidence handicaps such as severely emotionally disturbed, hearing impaired, and visually impaired)," (Marrs, 1984, p. 338).

EDSE 580: Advanced Instructional Design for Rural Special Education, included the global competency identified by Helge (1983), and elaborated by Marrs (1984) related to "an awareness of alternate resources to provide services to rural handicapped students and skills to identify alternate resources," (Marrs, 1984, p. 338).

EDSE 580: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - I, included the global competency identified by Helge (1983), and elaborated by Marrs (1984) related to developing "skills in working with citizens and agencies in rural communities to facilitate cooperation among schools and service agencies to serve handicapped students," (Marrs, 1984, p. 338).

EDSE 580: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - II, included the global competency identified by Helge (1983), and elaborated by Marrs (1984) related to demonstrating an "understanding of personal development skills (a) for their own professional growth and (b) to build a local support system in their rural environment," (Marrs, 1984, p. 338).

EDSE 580: Consultation Skills for Rural Special Education, included the global concepts and competencies identified by Helge

(1983), and elaborated by Marrs (1984) related to demonstrating "skills in working with parents of rural handicapped students," and, developing "skills in working with peer professionals from rural environments," (Marrs, 1984, p. 338).

EDFI 596: Statistics in Education, provided participants with knowledge and skills related to statistics as a tool in education and research, and included descriptive statistics, transformation of scores, sampling and probability, linear correlation and regression, introduction to statistical inference, and basic tests of significance. Further, this course provided participants skills in using statistical methods unique to special populations.

EDFI 597: Research in Education, provided participants with knowledge and skills related to research, and included identification and evaluation of research problems, research designs, use of library resources, data gathering, and writing research reports. Unique to Project RAISE, this course included the identification and planning of research projects relative to rural special education settings which team members then completed during the later phases of project participation.

EDSE 599: Thesis Research, provided participants with both credit and structure for completion of their research projects defined in EDFI 597.

EDSE 580: Professional Development Seminar in Special Education, provided participants with advisement regarding the graduate program in special education. This course included information on available support services for graduate students, faculty research, areas of specialization, forms needing attention for completion of graduate studies, and other related topics.

Practicum experiences. The level of a participant's expertise can best be determined by how well s/he integrates what has been learned into everyday experiences. Participants in Project RAISE had the opportunity to apply what they had learned in the environment for which they were being prepared to teach. Authentic practicum situations, rural special education settings, allowed the participants to apply what they had learned, and at the same time receive assistance from a supervisor which enabled further improvement of skills. Practicum experiences in Project RAISE were scheduled for completion as participants enrolled in both EDSE 562: Practicum in Rural Special Education - I, and EDSE 562: Practicum in Rural Special Education - II. These practicum experiences were coordinated with the content coursework so that each practicum course emphasized specific knowledge and skills. Each practicum experience allowed for periodic on-site observations, and was evaluated through multiple means (e.g., supervisor evaluation, team teacher evaluation).

EDSE 562: Practicum in Rural Special Education - I, provided participants with a supervised teaching experience in a rural special education setting. In particular, this practicum experience emphasized those skills attained in EDSE 580: Foundations and Instructional Strategies for Rural Special Education, EDSE 580: Advanced Instructional Design for Rural Special Education, and EDSE 580: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - I.

EDSE 562: Practicum in Rural Special Education - II, provided participants with a second supervised teaching experience in a rural special education setting. In particular, this second practicum experience emphasized those skills attained in EDSE 580: Consultation

Skills for Rural Special Education, and EDSE 580: Collaboration for Related Educational Services - II.

It was intended that these practica provide participants with a rich experience in which they were able to display their knowledge and skills attained concerning the provision of special education services for rural school populations. These experiences also provided the project administration, who supervised such experiences, the opportunity to observe and evaluate each participant's learning and application of the identified competencies.

Learner outcomes and their evaluation. Rural special educators may frequently be expected to carry out a number of assignments that are above and beyond the typical job scope of the average special education teacher. These assignments may place the rural special educator in a position where s/he feels somewhat unsure of her/his capabilities because s/he hasn't received training in all of the areas of expectation. Following this need, the learner outcomes of Project RAISE were designed to incorporate such knowledge, skills, and abilities.

As a result of the course of study and the six hours of practicum experience, participants were:

-- proficient in assisting with the use of alternative communication systems;

-- able to use appropriate technologies to design adaptive devices which promote or enhance a student's physical and cognitive development;

-- able to use appropriate technologies to select adaptive devices which promote or enhance a student's physical and cognitive development;

-- able to develop vocational training sequences based on an analysis of local community employment needs;

-- able to apply behavioral analysis procedures to academic and vocational training sequences for students;

-- able to apply behavioral analysis techniques to improve student behavior;

-- able to apply appropriate consultation and communication principles with peers;

-- able to apply appropriate consultation and communication principles with parents;

-- able to select and administer appropriate assessment tools irrespective of student age or handicap;

-- able to coordinate multifactored assessment activities;

-- able to select and adapt academic materials that are appropriate to student age, interest, and ability;

-- able to use both regular and special education curricula for program planning;

-- able to apply alternative teaching methodologies and accommodation strategies;

-- able to provide age appropriate social skill training to students;

-- able to apply time management strategies (e.g., in order to solve scheduling problems);

-- able to apply federal and state mandates for the education of handicapped students;

-- able to use approved medical emergency intervention strategies; and,

-- able to assist in carry-over activities related to supplemental services, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech/language therapy, guidance and counseling, art therapy, music therapy, adaptive physical education, and mobility orientation.

Evaluation of these learner outcomes occurred through various means. These methods of evaluation included observation of the application of such knowledge, skills, and abilities in practicum settings; quizzes and tests; development of course-related products (e.g., assessment files; behavior analysis programs); and, other means as deemed appropriate through the development of the courses and experiences, and through consultation with related services professionals.

Evaluative Analyses and Problem Areas

Course evaluations and qualitative evaluations at the completion of each course and each term have provided some preliminary information on the effectiveness of the training model. Many planned measures of evaluation will be conducted now since completion of the program has been achieved by all funded participants.

Nineteen trainees have completed Project RAISE training. Eighteen of these trainees have graduated with a Master of Education in Special Education, specializing in rural service delivery. One trainee is yet to graduate, still needing to complete some graduation requirements, but having completed all aspects of the training program.

Eight trainees completed theses as a part of the training program. Topics for these theses included aspects related to mainstreaming in a rural environment, problems and issues in employing a collaboration model of service delivery in a rural setting, leisure skill training needs for the multihandicapped population served in a rural environment, personnel recruitment and retention issues for rural special education service delivery, and the use of intervention assistance teams in rural school environments. In most cases, each study used comparison groups of individuals found in urban settings. One thesis is still in progress.

It should be noted that the original intention was to have all Project RAISE participants complete research projects/theses during their training. However, only the first group of trainees were able to complete this task. On further consideration, project faculty determined that this task was too intensive to include in a year-long training program, and it was discouraged with the second group of trainees.

As of this date, all nineteen Project RAISE participants have employment in a rural school setting. We are continuing to follow-up this aspect of the training program, as well as collect additional information related to the competencies of the project and the degree to which mastery and usage has been achieved by our trainees.

Participants have reported that each of the courses experienced have been above average in organization, the materials employed, the completion of course goals, and the overall evaluation. Furthermore, when asked to evaluate the instructors of the courses and practica, participants have indicated above average evaluation of their interest in students, ability to organize, ability to facilitate, knowledge of course content, provision of feedback, and overall evaluation.

Qualitative comments offered by participants included such statements as, "Useful and practical to my teaching," "Interesting and informative," "I enjoyed meeting with other teachers/professionals to consult," "I think this class is very helpful in learning to work with others for the good of the students," and, "This class can be very useful to us when in the schools." Comments such as have lead us to believe that our training program may be on the right track.

On the other hand, there are several problem areas that need to be resolved with such a training model. For example, the project faculty may have relied too heavily on area administrators to assist in recruiting and selecting practicing teachers for this project. Two of our initial candidates did not remain in the project, and this may have resulted from a misunderstanding on the part of area administrators in selecting potential candidates. The flexibility required for a practicing teacher to fully share his or her classroom for a year must be understood. Mentoring, as an instructional process, also plays a key role in the success of participants. Candidates chosen who did not exhibit this flexibility or ability to mentor did not continue in the program.

We also lost one of our undergraduate candidates. This was possibly due to the project faculty, when selecting undergraduate candidates, not recognizing the stress that such a program would place on students who have been in higher education for the previous four to five years, and who are experiencing other life alterations (e.g., getting married). The impact of such factors must be realized if the program is to succeed.

One other concern that bears consideration is the method used for determining effective pairings. Even if the above two concerns are answered relative to the selection of project participants, once those participants are selected they must be paired. During this project, we were able to test the pairing through the student teaching experience. However, as this project moves away from federal support dollars, some of the more costly aspects of the program may need modification. We are presently attempting to explore ways in which this pairing can be tested or better ensured without the use of the student teaching experience.

CONCLUSION

The need for special educators in rural settings to have more comprehensive preparation is obvious. Many resources, services, and specialized personnel are frequently unavailable to the rural handicapped student on a timely and consistent basis. Consequently, it has been shown that special education staff in rural settings are required to possess broader and more diverse skills, to be more able to operate independent of other special educators and other special education services, and to be highly skilled at adaptation and accommodation, as well as a host of other more specific abilities. In order to address these needs, a preservice teacher training program -- Project RAISE -- has been developed to prepare teachers for service in rural northwest Ohio special education settings.

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Note: The preparation of this paper was funded, in part, by Grant #H029J90015 - Project RAISE - from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, to Drs. Steven C. Russell, Veronica Gold, and Ellen U. Williams, and Bowling Green State University.